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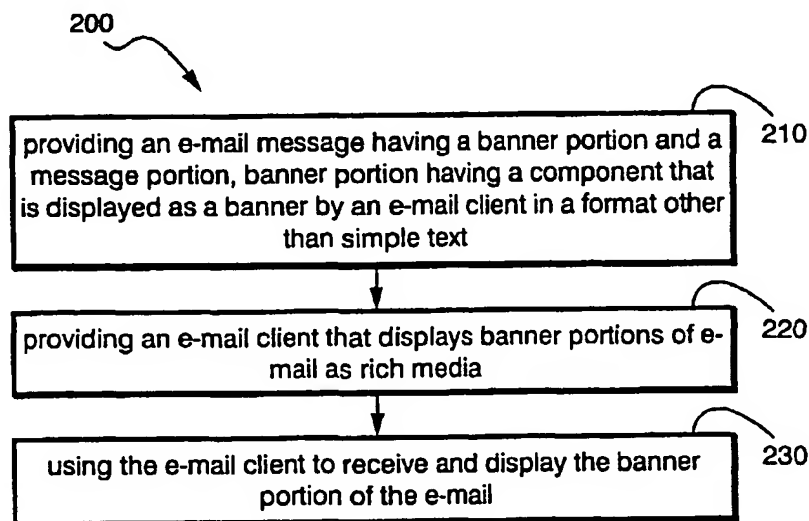
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(54) Title: **E-MAIL WITH RICH-MEDIA BANNER**



(57) Abstract: A banner (20) of an e-mail is displayed by an e-mail client in a format other than simple text (210). The banner component (60) may advantageously comprise at least one of a blinking element, a translating (moving) element (41), an active hyperlink graphic (51, 52), and a plurality of colors (61, 62). The banner component (60) may be inserted into the e-mail in any suitable manner, including adding the component (60) to the Regarding section of the e-mail. Preferred e-mail messages contain a tracking component that assists in tracking a response of the recipient to the e-mail message (230).



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*For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.*

## E-MAIL WITH RICH-MEDIA BANNER

### Field of The Invention

The field of the invention is electronic mail.

### Background of The Invention

5           Electronic mail, or e-mail as it has become more generally known, has been available as a means of communicating among users in networked systems for decades. The popularity of e-mail has skyrocketed in recent years, partly because of the wide availability of personal computers and the ascendance of the graphics rich World Wide Web.

10           There are numerous services on the market for creating, sending and viewing e-mail, including Eudora™ and Microsoft™ Outlook™. Interestingly, most or all of the popular e-mail clients record and display e-mails in a format including a "To:" section, a "From:" section, a "Regarding:" section, a "cc:" section, and a "body" or "message" section. To simplify access, these various sections are often presented to the user in a  
15           tabulated format. Among other things, this allows recipients of e-mail to scan received e-mail, and delete undesired items without opening and reading them.

            For several years advertisers have been sending out e-mails as part of targeted direct mail campaigns. The advertisers know that recipients often scan their received e-mail before opening the message portion, and compensate by including catchy phrases in  
20           the Re: section as a sort of banner. The term "banner" is employed in this application in a slightly broader sense, to include all messages that are displayed to the user regarding an e-mail other than the main body of the e-mail. Advertisers often use e-mail banners to describe the subject matter or topic of the e-mail, or to trick the recipient into thinking that he received a message from an acquaintance. For example, a banner may state "Bill, look  
25           at this!", or "Returning your message".

            As recipients become inundated with undesired e-mail, they become increasingly adept at spotting and deleting advertising messages based on the content of the banners. The flip side of the coin, however, is that much of the e-mail advertising actually serves the very valuable purpose of providing information. Many individuals even request that e-

mail advertisements be sent to them to provide information on special offers, events, and so forth.

Often, the space allocated for banners is too small to alert the recipient as to the value of the message. In other instances the space may be inadequate only because the sender is limited in displaying only ordinary text. Thus, there is a continuing need to provide banners with additional impact, and to remove at least some of the existing banner limitations.

### **Summary of the Invention**

The present invention provides systems and methods for including a component in the banner of an e-mail, the banner displayed by an e-mail client in a format other than simple text.

The banner component may advantageously comprise at least one of a blinking element, a translating (moving) element, an active hyperlink graphic, and a plurality of colors. The banner component may be inserted into the e-mail in any suitable manner, including adding the component to the Regarding section of the e-mail.

E-mail messages according to the present invention preferably contain a tracking component that assists in tracking a response of a recipient to the e-mail message. Contemplated responses that can be tracked include opening of the e-mail and forwarding of the e-mail. Preferred e-mail messages may also contain rich media such as audio, video, or animation, or in general any message component in the message portion that is also displayed by the e-mail client in a format other than simple text.

Various objects, features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description of preferred embodiments of the invention, along with the accompanying drawings in which like numerals represent like components.

### **Brief Description of The Drawings**

Fig. 1 is a schematic of a display of an e-mail client depicting rich media banners.

Fig. 2 is a flow chart showing a preferred method according to the inventive subject matter.

### **Detailed Description**

In Figure 1 a display 10 of an e-mail client depicts multiple banners 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, and 80. Banner 20 is a prior art banner, and is displayed in a simple text format. Banners 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, and 80 are displayed in formats other than simple text.

The e-mail client is contemplated to be any commercially available service that displays e-mail using a banner. Some of the most popular are Eudora™ and Microsoft™ Outlook™. At present, known services do not display rich media formats in the banner portion of e-mails, but it is not difficult for such services to begin doing so. The technology is already developed for other applications, and merely needs to be applied to banners.

Banner 30 is primarily text, but has a blinking element 31 (shown in relief to depict blinking). Banner 40 includes a translating (moving) element 41, that moves back and forth in the banner as depicted by arrows 42, 43. Banner 50 includes active hyperlink graphics 51, 52 which in this instance provides a link to a web site (not shown) and an ecommercial (not shown). Hyperlinks are among the many ways in which a banner can be made interactive. Banner 60 includes text in a plurality of colors (shown with two different fills 61, 62 to depict two different colors). Banner 70 includes text of varying fonts 71, 72 and font sizes 73, 74. Banner 80 includes a multi-line text 81, an audio clip icon 82 and a video clip icon 83. Both the audio clip and the video clip may play on the recipient's computer when the banner is displayed. Of course, virtually any two or more of these rich media features can be included together in a banner.

The rich media features described above 31, 41-43, 51-52, 61-62, 71-74, and 81-83 are preferably added to the banners using the same formatting and drag and drop techniques one would otherwise use to move these features into the body of an E-mail message. Playable rich media features are preferably transmitted to recipients as executable files, meaning that they are directly interpreted or executed by the operating system of a computer as opposed to being "played" by player software. Although it is contemplated that e-mail, and perhaps the tracking or playing software, can be transmitted as multiple files, it is preferred to transmit the entire e-mail along with all software needed

to track or play the e-mail as a single file. It is also contemplated that some or all of the e-mail or supporting software can be downloaded separately from the transmission that includes the e-mail.

5 The e-mail preferably also contains a tracking component that assists in tracking a response of a recipient to the e-mail message. Contemplated responses that can be tracked include opening of the e-mail, forwarding of the e-mail, clicking through to a hyperlink, and playing an audio or video portion of a banner. More sophisticated tracking data may include file opening time, video start and stop times, and cursor positioning. Such information may advantageously be stored in the "cookies" section, or preferably in the  
10 registry of the recipient's computer (not shown). Preferred e-mail contains an identification code for use in tracking.

Preferred e-mail messages may also contain rich media, including audio, video, or animation in the message portion of the e-mail.

In Figure 2, A preferred method 200 according to the inventive subject matter  
15 preferably includes the following steps: providing an e-mail message having a banner portion and a message portion; the banner portion having a component that is displayed as a banner by an e-mail client in a format other than simple text 210; providing an e-mail client that displays banner portions of e-mail as rich media 220; and using the e-mail client to receive and display the banner portion of the e-mail message 230.

20 Thus, specific methods and systems of providing rich media e-mail banners have been disclosed. It should be apparent to those skilled in the art, however, that many more modifications besides those already described are possible without departing from the inventive concepts herein. The inventive subject matter, therefore, is not to be restricted except in the spirit of the appended claims. Moreover, in interpreting both the specification  
25 and the claims, all terms should be interpreted in the broadest possible manner consistent with the context. In particular, the terms "comprises" and "comprising" should be interpreted as referring to elements, components, or steps in a non-exclusive manner, indicating that the referenced elements, components, or steps may be present, or utilized, or combined with other elements, components, or steps that are not expressly referenced.

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:














1. An improved e-mail message having a banner portion and a message portion, the improvement comprising the banner portion having a component that is displayed as a banner by an e-mail client in a format other than simple text.  
5
2. The improved message of claim 1 wherein the format includes a blinking element.
3. The improved message of claim 1 wherein the format includes a moving element.
4. The improved message of claim 1 wherein the format includes a hyperlink graphic.
5. The improved message of claim 1 wherein the format includes a plurality of colors.
- 10 6. The improved message of claim 1 further comprising a To section, a From section, and a Regarding section, wherein the component is included in the Regarding section.
7. The improved message of claim 1 wherein the content portion includes a second component that is displayed by the e-mail client in a second format other than simple text.  
15
8. The improved message of claim 1 further comprising a tracking component that assists in tracking a response of a recipient to the e-mail message.
9. The improved message of claim 8 wherein the response comprises opening of the e-mail message.
- 20 10. The improved message of claim 8 wherein the response comprises forwarding of the e-mail message to another recipient.
11. The improved message of claim 1 wherein the e-mail client operates in a window of a browser.
12. The improved message of claim 1 wherein the e-mail client operates outside a window of a browser.  
25

13. The improved message of claim 1 wherein the e-mail client comprises Microsoft™ Outlook™.



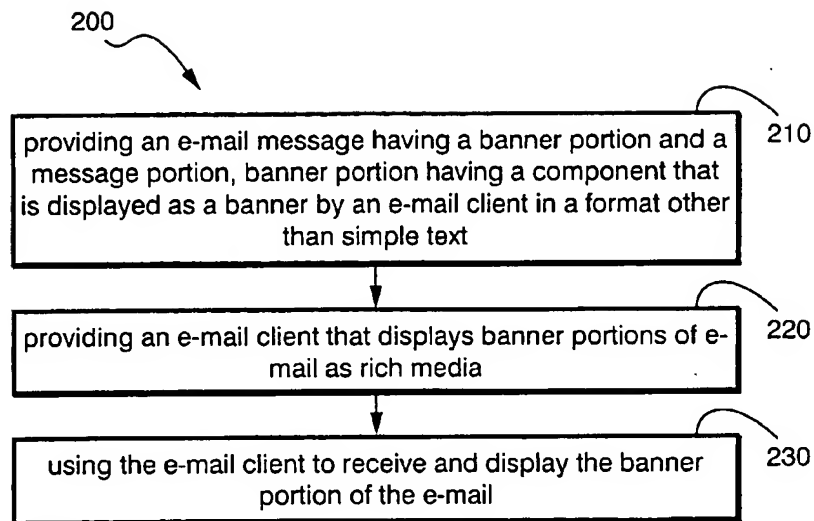
FIG. 1

10

| TYPE  | FROM        | SUBJECT  | RECEIVED |
|---|-------------|--|----------|
|    | Smith, R    | Offshore Weather!!   | 3/12/00  |
|    | Jones, K    | Find Background About ANYONE   | 3/12/00  |
|    | Paul        | Pay off  ALL  your Bills       | 3/12/00  |
|    | Joe Lambert | Homeowners  who need cash        | 3/12/00  |
|    | XYE         | Serious Entrepreneurs Only   | 3/11/00  |
|    | ABC         | Your <b>Free</b> SMALL CAP Newsletter  | 3/6/00   |
|  | Youkhama    | GREAT SOUNDS OF YESTERYEAR   | 3/6/00   |

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2/2

*FIG. 2*

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.  
PCT/US00/07997

| <b>A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER</b><br>IPC(7) : G06F 17/60, G06F 13/00<br>US CL : 705/27, 26, 10; 709/221, 224, 200<br>According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>B. FIELDS SEARCHED</b><br>Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)<br>U.S. : 705/27, 26, 10; 709/221, 224, 200<br>Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched<br>IEEE, Microsoft Computer Dictionary<br>Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)<br>WEST, IEEE, EAST, STN |  |  |
| <b>C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT</b>   |  |  |
| Category*   | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages   | Relevant to claim No.  |
| Y   | US 6,029,141 A (BEZOS et al) 22 February 2000, fig.1, col.5 line 15 to col.6 line 30, col.9 line 41 to col.10 line 28 and col.11 lines 1-42.   | 1-13   |
| Y   | US 5,742,768 A (GENNARO et al) 21 April 1998, fig.2A, col.3, lines 20-64, col.5 lines 6-41.  | 1-13   |
| A   | US 5,892,908 A (HUGHES et al) 06 April 1999, col.3 lines 15-62   | 1-13   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.   |  |  |
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| Date of the actual completion of the international search<br>13 JUNE 2000   |  | Date of mailing of the international search report<br>13 JUL 2000                          |
| Name and mailing address of the ISA/US<br>Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks<br>Box PCT<br>Washington, D.C. 20231<br>Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230   |  | Authorized officer <i>For Eugenio Zagar</i><br>AHMAD MATAR<br>Telephone No. (703) 305-4731 |